

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

WE ENVISION...

...a city in which an effective communication system reaches and engages community members of all ages, including older adults.

WE HEARD...

- Boston older adults do not feel adequately informed.
- 30% of survey respondents are dissatisfied with how activities and events are communicated to older residents.
- Older adults depend on a wide range of media.
- Over half of survey respondents prefer newspapers and TV as sources of information about programs, activities and services in their community. Nearly 40% prefer the internet.



WE HEARD:

“I think the city has a lot I am unaware of. I would like to see a means by which, by the time you reach a certain age, we could be notified by mail or e-mail. We need a location for all different types of information. More awareness of available programs with a wider distribution is needed.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“I am hearing impaired and my first language is not English, so it can be difficult to understand information.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“I signed up for phone messages from the City and have been impressed by the process. It was especially helpful around the time of the Marathon bombings and when weather is very bad.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

WE ARE...

Improving Access
through Communications

There are many communication efforts already underway throughout the City. The City provides free internet and access to computers through the Central Boston Public Library and all 24 neighborhood branches. The City increased access to free WiFi in 180 locations throughout the city through the “Wicked Free WiFi” program. The Mayor hired the City’s first Chief Digital Officer to build a digital services team working to improve access to city resources. Their work includes a redesigned city website: Boston.gov. There has also been the launch and expansion of **Boston 311**, an easy-to-remember telephone number that connects residents with highly-trained Constituent Service Center representatives who can answer requests for non-emergency City services and information, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. Residents can opt-in to receive emergency alerts through a citywide system, available in four languages, notifying user by text or phone call when there is an emergency.

Communications at the
Elderly Commission

At the Commission, we have hired our first Communication Director, forming a new dedicated unit. This team maintains current communication channels, including **Boston Seniority Magazine** and social media channels. The City partnered with Comcast to provide access to affordable internet services to low-income seniors through The Internet Essentials Senior Pilot. Our partners “Tech Goes Home” and Comcast also collaborated on expanded computer training for older adults through a train-the-trainer model. Additionally, the Commission uses a robocall system to reach seniors during extreme weather, with important safety and contact information.

KEYWORDS:

BOSTON 311: The City’s 24/7 constituent services call center dedicated to connecting residents to city services, increasing civic engagement and providing a quality experience. Constituent advocates are ready to help with any requests or questions residents have.

BOSTON SENIORITY MAGAZINE: Monthly publication that covers news, topics, events, and other issues of interest to older Bostonians.

WE WILL...

Recommendation #1:

Develop a Senior Communication Plan.

Action Item A: We will develop a strategic Senior Communications Plan that will serve as a roadmap for communications across all channels, including traditional and new media. This plan will pay particular attention to strengthening audience engagement and recognizing and reflecting Boston’s diversity of languages, cultures, neighborhoods, and interests.

Recommendation #2: Review and determine communications best practices to better reach our audience.

Action Item A: We will conduct and analyze marketing research about the communications preferences of older adults. This will include reviewing national and local trends, as well as understanding best communication practices that other cities employ when informing older residents about resources, services, and activities. Within this review, we will identify strategies that allow us to reach diverse populations. We will honor what is already happening.

Action Item B: With the help of the Mayor’s Press Team and the Department of Innovation and Technology, we will investigate current and potential uses of communication methods and new technology, taking into account a wide range of technological abilities.

Action Item C: We will review all current external communication methods that exist at the Commission, to understand our own baseline metrics.

Action Item D: As part of the Communications strategy, we will identify the most popular sources for news and information and use this knowledge to deepen outreach to

neighborhood-based newspapers, cable television, web-based news outlets, church newsletters and bulletins.

Recommendation #3: Enhance existing communication channels, using the determined best practices and marketing research, and leveraging community partners to expand reach.

Action Item A: We will develop even more holistic, effective ways to share important information about programs, services and events with older adults, leveraging our community partners.

Action Item B: We will develop a marketing piece that lists the most important phone numbers for older residents. This piece of collateral will also carry over to our digital properties on the Boston.gov website and social media.

Action Item C: We will build upon our existing communications channels, like social media, Boston Seniority Magazine and the **Seniors Count TV** show, with an emphasis on creating consistent, engaging content.

Action Item D: We will leverage city data to advance equity. The City will pursue a study on 311 services and use the data to serve residents by increasing resident access and awareness, and identifying gaps in service. Working with the City’s Language Access Coordinator, 311 data will be centralized with responses and translated into multiple languages to improve accessibility.

KEYWORDS:

SENIORS COUNT TV SHOW: Weekly cable television show hosted by Elderly Commission staff with guest experts on topics of interest to older Boston residents.